

Castlemaine Naturalist

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Birds, 61 Hunter Street, Summer and Autumn.

During the long, dry summer the bird baths have been in constant use and required regular filling - particularly after the handsome young Grey Currawong, Magpies or ravens had been around. It appears to have been a good breeding season, especially for the smaller birds, and I have seen Goldfinches, Grey Fantails, Yellow-rumped Thornbills, Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, Striated Pardalotes, Rufous Whistler and Silvereyes in various stages of development all appearing at the baths with mature birds for splashing about and to quench their thirst.

After a very long absence we are again being visited by a Scarlet Robin almost daily to drink and bathe while ignoring the Sparrows and New Holland Honeyeaters' intimidating tactics.

The Striated Pardalotes and Crimson Rosellas bred as usual in the nest boxes, but the only nests found in our garden have been those of the resident Blackbird and unwelcome Sparrows. The small area of bush behind our property must shelter the others and is therefore of great importance to the small bird population.

A group of Starlings reappeared after a lengthy absence, and immediately adopted the vacated Rosella nest box as home. We blocked off the entrance and they disappeared.

A Common Bronzewing drops in occasionally, and the Red Wattlebirds come and go, as does the Mistletoe Bird.

The Tasmanian Silvereyes are two weeks earlier than usual, and have flown in for their communal baths and a feed of figs - lean pickings this year as my crop is not so prolific and is late in ripening. The birds were in small groups of 8 to 13.

Overall it has been a wonderful Summer to laze around outside in my comfortable chair and just watch the birds - ignoring the jungle-like appearance of the garden and postponing the many tiresome chores inside the house.

Shirley Parnaby

Castlemaine Golf Course Birds, March.

Stubble Quail	Feral Pigeon	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Australian Wood Duck	Common Bronzewing	Olive-backed Oriole
Pacific Black Duck	Crested Pigeon	Dusky Woodswallow
Hoary-headed Grebe	Long-billed Corella	and young
Little Pied Cormorant	Sulphur-crested	Magpie
Great Black Cormorant	Cockatoo	Grey Currawong
White-faced Heron	Musk Lorikeet	Black Currawong
White-necked (Pacific) Heron	Purple-crowned Lorikeet	Raven sp.
Australian White Ibis	Crimson Rosella	Red-browed Finch
Little Eagle	Restless Flycatcher	European Goldfinch
Black-fronted Dotterel	Magpie-lark	Welcome Swallow
Masked Lapwing	Willie Wagtail	Blackbird
Galah	White-throated	Golden Whistler
	Needletails	

Les Prendergast thinks he saw Rainbow Bee-eaters eating European Wasps at a nest of wasps near the 17th tee.

Debbie Worland

Easter in the Strathbogies

Maggie Oliver and I spent Easter on "Peppermint Ridge", a property in the Strathbogie Ranges not far from Strathbogie village. Ben and Olwyn Brooke had invited BOCA to hold the Easter camp on their covenanted property, and to take advantage of the walking tracks they have developed.

Part of the property is improved pasture and they run a herd of Belted Galloway cattle, another area is wet sclerophyll forest, and the northern end is drier with a different type of habitat altogether. It is granite country with some large rock platforms, has a 45 inch rainfall, can manage a frosty -2.5°C (we discovered that the first night!) and is in the middle of drought, so like on the Gippsland trip, the vegetation doesn't look quite what you'd expect of a high rainfall area.

There was very little in flower, or even in fruit, but there were quite a few birds, though not the variety we find here. However, I managed to spot 39 different species for 3 days, and the BOCA total up to when we left was 93, which included quite a few birds not found on the property but were recorded on excursions around the area, but a high percentage of the count was found on the property, including Satin Bowerbird, Wedgetailed Eagle, Wonga Pigeon, Common and Brush Bronzewing, Gang Gang Cockatoo and King Parrot, but the birds of the camp would have to have been the robins - Scarlet, Eastern Yellow, and Flame - and the Crimson Rosellas - there were scores of them!

Early on Easter Sunday, a group, including our hosts, met in the early sun on the hillside, around a small fire lit on top of one of the granite platforms, to take part in an Easter Celebration, which was very simple, but added atmosphere to the Easter story.

Maggie and I set off for home on Monday, heading up to road to Violet Town, with the eventual intention of having our lunch at Whroo, but when we arrived we found the place crowded with Rover Scouts - among others - who were just finishing a three day exercise. We hastily left, and stopped further up the road towards Rushworth - and that spot was crowded with Red Wattlebirds! We gave up then and eventually settled for a spot on the range before Toolleen, where we had a wonderful, soothing view of good old Mount Alexander, Major Mitchell's "friendly hill".

Rita Mills.

Observations

- Margaret Panter spotted a Koala in a tree beside the Poverty Gully track recently.
- Shirley Parnaby reports that the "Southern Boobook has returned to the perching tree in the Botanic Gardens with a mate this year after spending March to November last year in solitude. Over the Summer I have heard frequent calls from the garden at Buda and also from the golf course area at Kalimna - perhaps the same pair, or maybe the local population is increasing!"
- Shirley also reports that the "hardy Parsons Bands (orchids) popped through the impacted earth at Expedition Pass after the welcome rain in March along the edges and in the centre of a beaten track, which is their usual site. I noticed a couple (also on a beaten track) in the Kalimna bush, and on a rare visit to Farm Road, Daylesford, a few were struggling through a deep layer of leaf litter under the Messmates and beside the road."
- ZOe Thomas rang to report a "regular football crowd" of White-winged Choughs at her place near Fryerstown. Her usual flock of about 20 birds swelled in numbers to about 80 on Wednesday 18/4. The behaviour was rather pushy, and after some time groups of 9 or so birds peeled off with two others behind which seemed to be chivvying them along, not permitting any to turn back. **ZOe would be interested to know if anyone seen this kind of behaviour in Choughs before?**
- Several people have commented on the numbers of Crimson Rosellas around, particularly juveniles, but Chris Morris noted that the Sulphur-crested Cockatoos seem to have moved those at their place on, and are now busily getting seed from the pine cones.
- Brenda Envall hasn't taken all the apples from her tree as they were inclined to be soft and over-ripe, but recently he son called her to the garden where there was "an absolute swarm of Blue Wrens feeding on the apples"!

- From Ern Perkins - "This has been a good season for some of the autumn orchids. Parsons Bands has been abundant in many localities, as have Sharp Midge Orchid and Tiny Greenhood. In one locality there were the three species growing in a metre radius.
- Also from Ern is the observation that the Ironbarks at Muckleford appear to have few buds this year.
- Among a number of honeyeaters in her garden at Yapeen Margaret Badminton spotted a single Black-chinned, a first for her garden. A Golden Whistler family has also been around.
- Maureen and Ken Dredge report seeing three Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos overhead on the Highway at Yapeen, and have had Golden Whistlers near their house in Wesley Hill.

Club Campout for September?

A campout at Redman Bluff Camping Ground, in Long Gully Road, Pomonal, on the eastern slopes of the Grampians, is being mooted for the end of September, possibly over four or five days. As it is only a 2 ¼ hour drive you might prefer to spend just a day with the campers. Two larger and two smaller caravans are available, and there are shared cooking/barbecue facilities if we wish to use them, a community room with a fire, a telescope, walking tracks, lots of birds and flowers, and we will be able to visit a nearby native plant and protea nursery.

At the moment we are asking for expressions of interest so a firm booking can be made in plenty of time. Full information should be available by the May meeting. **Please let Rita Mills know if you are interested.**

From the president.

Do you have an e-mail address? The Club often gets information about events and activities with short notice. E-mail is a quick and economical way of informing members about such events. A list of members' e-mail addresses is being compiled. Add your address to the list that will be available at the meeting, or send it to me at lperkins@netcon.net.au.

Expedition Pass Management Plan. Sharon Williams has prepared a management plan for the reservoir reserve. The Club has a copy on CD, and also a paper copy of the summary. The CD and/or the summary can be borrowed by members. Part of the recommendations is to set up 10 metre by 10 metre plots, which will be fenced, and monitored to ascertain the effect of grazing.

Cape Broom and the Butterfly Area. Natasha Harris with a team of Green Corps personnel spent a half day recently pulling broom from the Botanic Gardens. They concentrated on the area weeded last year. An

estimate of 100,000 plants were pulled up. It was a wonderful effort from the Green Corps members.

The Club has received a grant of \$1500 to prepare and install signage for the butterfly area, and produce explanatory leaflets. The Club is working with Peter Johnson of DNRE on the project.

Insurance. The cost of public liability insurance has increased markedly. It's cost is now more than double that of a few years ago. The increase in costs will make it difficult for the Club to keep within its budget.

Speakers and Programs. The committee aims to have a variety of speakers on a variety of topics and would welcome your suggestions for topics and possible speakers.

Victorian Field Naturalists Clubs Association. The March 2002 Campout will be conducted by the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria, and will be at Campaspe Downs, between Kyneton and Tylden.

Photo-point CD. The CD is available for sale at \$20. It includes copies of the photographs, and the database.

Plants of the Castlemaine District. Chris Morris, on behalf of the Club, is investigating the possibility of producing a CD containing photographs of the plants of the Central Goldfields. Such a CD would probably be a co-operative effort from a number of organisations.

E.Perkins

Plants of the Brisbane Ranges - book review.

CSIRO Publishing has recently published *Wildflowers of the Brisbane Ranges*, by Clive and Merle Trigg. The book contains almost 400 coloured photographs of plants of the Brisbane Ranges. The photographs are of a high quality, and each is accompanied by the scientific and common name, the family, flowering time, a brief description, the preferred habitat and soil type. The front cover contains a map of the park, and the end cover a soil map. The cost is about \$20 - \$25.

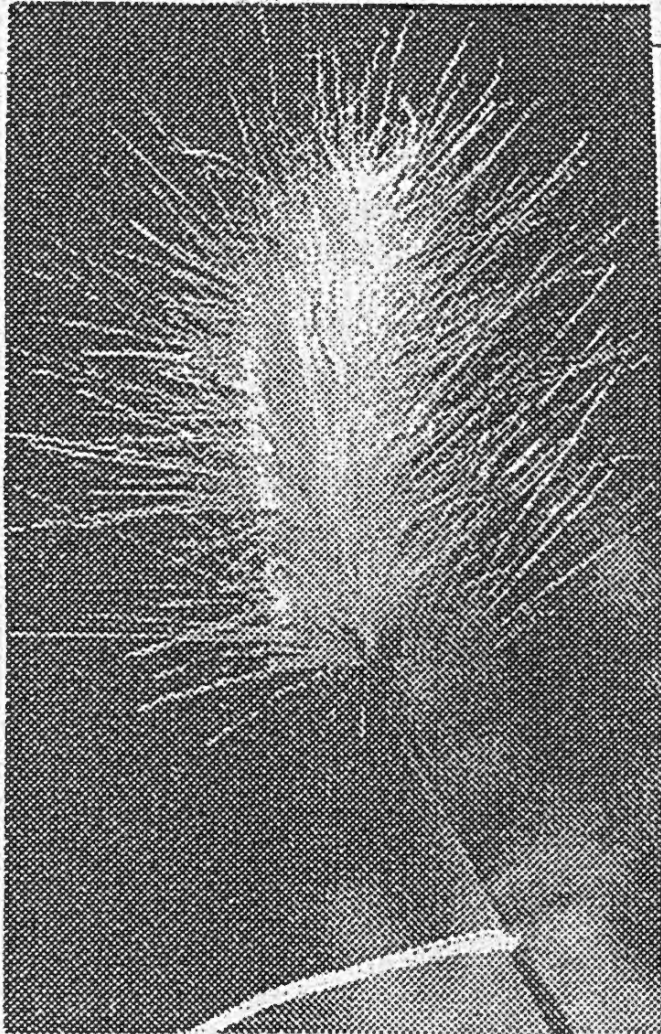
The names are up to date. For example, the familiar Blue Caladenia of our local forests is now *Canicula caerulea* var *caerulea*, and the less common Blue-beard Orchid is *Canicula deformis*.

Most of the plants of the Brisbane Ranges also grow in the Central Goldfields. The book is recommended to those who want a low cost guide to the Brisbane Ranges, or to the local forests.

Timelines - Alan Reid has written to the ANN regarding a project he has undertaken to collate unpublished observations made by naturalists. These are published bi-monthly in "Timelines" which is available from the Gould League for \$15 for 6 bi-monthly newsletters. Should we subscribe?

Question Corner.

Is Swamp Foxtail-grass (*Pennisetum alopecuroides*) a native?



Swamp Foxtail-grass is an ornamental grass with showy feathery flower heads. It is often sold in nurseries. It also grows locally. However *Pennisetum villosum* is more common

The Flora of Victoria (vol 2 p 611) states that *Pennisetum* has about 70 species from warm, near tropical countries, and that in Australia there are 13 species, of which 9 are introduced. All 5 Victorian species, including Swamp Foxtail-grass, are listed as introduced. The National Herbarium at Melbourne (Ross 1996) also states that all species growing wild in Victoria are introduced.

The Flora of NSW (Vol. 4 p 498) states that there are about 130 species world wide, and that Swamp Foxtail is a native species.

So it depends on which side of the Murray you live.

Sometimes it is difficult to know whether or not a species is introduced. If a plant was collected by early collectors, then it has been assumed that the species is native. However, weeds were brought in by the first fleet and continued to be brought in over the years. The plants sometimes spread rapidly, and so it may be difficult to decide whether a plant is native or not.

DNA analysis can show the amount of divergence between the Australian population and the populations overseas. A close match indicates that the plant has been introduced. If the plant is cosmopolitan (i.e. native to both Australia and overseas countries), there may be a both native and introduced specimens of the same species. There may also be plants of the one species that has been introduced from widely different localities.

The illustration shows *Pennisetum villosum*, growing in Hargraves Street.

EP

FROM THE BUSINESS MEETING, 26/4/01 (also see President's report)

SOME SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE NOW OVERDUE. If you haven't yet paid yours please do so ASAP as this CN will have to be the last to be sent to unfinancial members. From the point of view of an effective voice in the community a large, strong membership carries a lot of weight so the Club very much appreciates your continued support.

Trees in Forest Creek Picnic area. George Broadway reported that four of the five Yellow Box trees that were planted by the club several years ago are thriving, but the fifth one has died. He suggested that perhaps the Club could replace it.

ANN Get Together Nov. 2002. This will be hosted by Launceston FNC and they are asking for expressions of interest this month - this is not booking, but they would like to have an idea how many people would be interested in going. They are hoping to have two four day tours before and after the week long Get Together, too. If you are interested please contact the Secretary or President. (Launceston FNC e-mail: jayemes@bigpond.com)

PLANTS OF THE MOUNT ALEXANDER SHIRE -

Small-leaf Parrot Pea, *Dillwynia phyllicoides*



The first time I saw this plant I was on a U3A walk on Morgan's track at Chewton. The gully and hillside was a blaze of rich warm yellow and the plants were smothered in flowers. Last year when I took a group out there the show wasn't a patch on the first one.

At first I took it to be *D. sericea*, but I soon realised the leaves were much smaller, slightly twisted and only about 3 mm long, the yellow and red flowers more crowded and tending to be reversed (upside down) and the plant much larger, being a bush growing to 1.5 metres.

D. phyllicoides has been known as *D. retorta* var. *phillicoides*, and *D. parvifolia*, among other synonyms - so I wasn't the only one to find it a little confusing.

I have only ever seen it at Chewton on Morgan's track, but it also occurs in the Elphinstone ridge area.

Rita Mills

CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST PROGRAM, MAY 2001

General Meetings are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall, at 8.00pm on the second Friday of each month, except January. Entrances to the car parks are beside the Art Gallery and beside the Church building in Lyttleton Street. **Excursions** leave promptly at times stated, usually on the Saturday after the general meeting, (BYO afternoon tea). There are NO excursions on TOTAL FIRE BAN days. **ALSO NOTE** that outdoor events are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions.

Business Meetings are held at 27 Doveton Street on the 4th Thursday of each month, except December, at 7.30pm. All members are invited to attend.

VISITORS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME

Fri. May 11 **Antarctica and Patagonian National Parks**. Speaker is Carol Hall, winner of the Ballarat Courier Slide of the Year competition. UCA hall, 8pm

Sat. May 12 **Highway Cleanup**. Meet at Tait Carriages, Pyres H'way, at 8.30am. There will be no cleanup if it is raining or foggy.

Sat May 12 **Rise and Shine** to look for **Autumn orchids**, then **Campbelltown** to look at **Permian glacial deposits**. (The Excursion to Golden Point Res. has had to be deferred to the June outing). Leave 13 Mostyn St. at 1.30pm. Leader E. Perkins.

Sat. 19 May **Swift Parrot Survey**. Meet at 27 Doveton St. at 9 am. Take snacks, drinks, lunch, binocs. (Early birds join Margaret B. at Guildford PO at 7.30am) The teams will meet for lunch at the Quince Tree between 12 and 1 pm. Anyone who wants to join for the **afternoon** only can meet them there. The spot is on Pullens Rd. which is to the left just past the Gower School ruin. After you enter the bush on your right, take the track approx. 100m on on your left.

Fri. June 9 **The Expedition Pass Project**. Speakers are John Ellis and Marie Jones of the Golden Point LandCare group. UCA hall, 8pm.

Sun June 10 **Golden Point Reservoir** (not Expedition Pass Res.) Leave 13 Mostyn St. at 1.30pm sharp. Leader E. Perkins. (Because there is a working quarry nearby which works 6 days a week Sunday is the only day that we can go to the Res.).

Sun July 1 **Birds Australia Big Birthday Birdwatch** -A chance for a fun day and also to catch up on some of the areas which have not been covered by regular surveys. Details next month.

Fri. 13 July. **Toad Studies in the Northern Territory**. Speaker is Graeme Watson. UCA hall, 8pm

Wed 15 Aug. **Cape Broom Pull**.

Disclaimer - The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributor and not necessarily those of the club.

2001 Committee E. Perkins (President) ph 5472 3124, C. Morris (V.P. and Grievance Officer), G. Broadway (Sec.). ph. 5472 2513, J. Turnbull (treas.) ph. 5474 3005, R. Mills (N/L Ed. and P.O.) ph 5472 4553, M. Dredge, M. Oliver, B. Maund, B. Envall.

Subscriptions for 2001 -

Ordinary Membership: Single \$22 Family, \$30

Pensioner or student: Single \$19 Family \$24

Supporting: \$31

The subscription also covers postage of the 'Castlemaine Naturalist'.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

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